

Abstract

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Authoritarianism and Ideology

This presentation looks into the relationship between authoritarian regimes and political ideologies. Ideology matters for authoritarian regimes in that it distracts the public's attention from the fact that such regimes serve particular interests rather than the public good. It follows that in authoritarian systems there often is a 'reality gap' between ideology and practice. The vision for the future also serves as a basis for legitimising the system, which is much needed to compensate for the lack of democratic legitimacy earned via free, fair and competitive elections. Hence control over the media is key to establishing and maintaining authoritarian regimes. Of course, every political system has an ideology. But authoritarian regimes distinguish themselves from democratic ones in that, through control over the media, they seek to achieve ideological hegemony and to marginalise alternative visions of the future, whereas democratic regimes tolerate ideological pluralism and hence do not seek control over the media. In other words, authoritarian regimes claim monopoly on truth, while democratic ones are open to public debates rooted in different understandings of the world. Further, control over the media is essential for authoritarian systems for the purpose of suppressing critical voices that might expose the gap between their words and deeds and hence create cognitive dissonance in peoples' heads that could undermine their rule.